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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 6 October 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Kyaw Tint Swe ..... (Myanmar)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 20: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (A/59/23 and A/59/134; A/C.4/59/4)

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Agenda item 82: Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/59/74)

1. **Mr. Moungara-Moussotsi** (Gabon), speaking on agenda item 20, said that Gabon, a former colony that had become an independent country and a Member of the United Nations, had always been extremely active, alongside other Member States, in support of Non-Self-Governing Territories in their struggle for freedom.

2. His delegation considered that the effectiveness of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples would be enhanced if the Non-Self-Governing Territories were better informed of their rights and if their representatives were enabled to participate in the work of the Special Committee and its bureaux. The number of visiting missions should also be increased.

3. With regard to the question of Western Sahara, the General Assembly could only continue to encourage negotiations in order to allay tensions and enable the Arab Maghreb to play its full role in the Mediterranean region.

4. **Mr. Badji** (Senegal), speaking on agenda item 20, said that the question of Western Sahara was of particular interest to Senegal in view of its long-standing relationship with the Kingdom of Morocco, which dated from the time of the Almoravids, when the Sahara had been a symbol of friendship and not, as it had become, an apple of discord between peoples belonging to the same cultural area.

5. While reaffirming its position that the Kingdom of Morocco should enjoy freedom of choice and continuing of territorial integrity and sovereignty, his delegation reiterated its support for the efforts aimed at bringing the peace process in Western Sahara to a successful conclusion for the greater good of all the peoples and countries of the Arab Maghreb. It also reiterated its support for the efforts made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy to that end. Despite a succession of setbacks, their initiatives had had the effect of creating a climate that was favourable to a rapprochement between the peoples and countries of the region, in particular between Morocco and Algeria. His delegation welcomed the fact that the process of normalizing relations between Algeria and Morocco had commenced during the Arab League Summit in Tunis in May 2004.

6. In the face of terrorism and extremism, at a time when Africa had decided to take its future into its own hands within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and when the trans-Sahara road project was on course to becoming a reality, negotiation was the only option from the perspective of the political settlement of disputes and reconciliation between peoples.

7. His delegation also appealed to the Frente POLISARIO to speed up the release of all prisoners of war. It urged all the parties to cooperate with the International Committee of the Red Cross with a view to settling the fate of disappeared people once and for all, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law.

8. **Mr. Oyarzún** (Spain) said that, in response to the succession of appeals in General Assembly resolutions, Spain was prepared to pursue negotiations with the United Kingdom in the interests of the people of Gibraltar. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain had also spoken out in favour of seeking a solution acceptable to all the parties. The Spanish Government was resolved to work for the establishment of harmonious cooperation in all areas

between Gibraltar and the Campo de Gibraltar so as to ensure that the economy of Gibraltar was in line with European Union norms. Only an "exemplary circle" of cooperation would enable all the parties to gain tangible benefits from such an exercise. The Campo de Gibraltar could thus become a technologically advanced and economically important region. In-depth negotiations on the sovereignty issue should not only yield rapid results but also lead to a future of cooperation and harmony for the people of Gibraltar.

9. As for the possibility of requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, he noted that the question of Gibraltar was essentially a political one rather than a legal issue. An advisory opinion therefore seemed inappropriate.

Hearing of representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories

10. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Corbin (Representative for External Affairs of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands) took a place at the table.*

11. **Mr. Corbin** (Representative for External Affairs of the Government of the United States Virgin Islands), after expressing his delegation's sympathy for the people of the Cayman Islands, who had been afflicted by the recent hurricanes, said that his Government had consistently emphasized the organic link between the process of political development in the Non-Self-Governing Territories and the assistance provided to those Territories by the United Nations system. Such assistance helped them to assume the powers of full self-government, in conformity with General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions.

12. The successful integration of Non-Self-Governing Territories in the work of several United Nations bodies promoted their sustainable development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, played a major role in coordinating assistance to the small island Non-Self-Governing Territories in the Caribbean. The report of the President of the Economic and Social Council on consultations held with the Chairman of the Special Committee on Decolonization (E/2004/47) provided a comprehensive account of UNDP assistance, together with information on the participation of some Non-Self-Governing Territories in regional programmes dealing with disaster management and with search and rescue capability. In addition, organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) involved some Territories in their work as associate members or observers, thus furnishing an additional level of integration of the Territories in the international process.

13. In that connection, he recalled that in its resolution 58/108 of 17 December 2003 the General Assembly had called for the inclusion of the United States Virgin Islands in UNDP regional programmes, consistent with the position of other Non-Self-Governing Territories, and had requested UNESCO to assist the Territory, under its records and archives management programme in carrying out its archival and artefacts initiative.

14. The regional commissions, in particular the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), helped the Non-Self-Governing Territories to participate in the work of United Nations bodies by extending associate membership to them. Indeed, the Government of the United States Virgin Islands currently presided over the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, the regional intergovernmental body of ECLAC, which comprised some 23 Caribbean Governments. The associate membership mechanism also provided the Territories with the opportunity to participate as observers in the various United Nations world conferences in the economic and social sphere and in the preparations for some international meetings, such as the forthcoming International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

15. In that connection, a study conducted several months earlier by ECLAC had identified a number of obstacles encountered by Territories that wished to participate in the major conferences, including a lack of information and limitations on access to external resources. Consideration might be given to the establishment of a voluntary fund to remedy such difficulties and promote closer collaboration between ECLAC and ESCAP. It had been further suggested that the Economic and Social Council should grant formal status to Territories that were already associate members of ECLAC, in accordance with a resolution to

that effect adopted by ECLAC at its thirtieth session in July 2004 which was currently under consideration by the Council.

16. The long-standing call by the General Assembly for political education programmes in the Territories to foster an awareness among the people of their legitimate political options could be realized through the support of the United Nations Electoral Unit. Similarly, it would be useful if the Special Committee could work with the regional commissions involved in the social and economic development of the Territories and the Human Rights Committee for the speedy implementation of decolonization.

17. Lastly, he drew the Committee's attention to the draft resolution currently before it, which related to the mandate given to the specialized agencies for the provision of assistance to the Territories to further their sustainable development.

18. *Mr. Corbin withdrew.*

19. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Caruana (Chief Minister of Gibraltar) took a place at the table.*

20. **Mr. Caruana** (Chief Minister of Gibraltar) said that, whatever their political allegiance, the political representatives of Gibraltar were unanimous in their defence of the inalienable right of the people of Gibraltar to self-determination and their resistance to anachronistic claims to the sovereignty of Gibraltar by the Kingdom of Spain in violation of that right.

21. By virtue of the principles and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and the precepts of international law, the only principle that could apply to the decolonization of Gibraltar was self-determination. Spain, however, in laying claim to the sovereignty of Gibraltar, harked back to a map of Europe as it was in 1704. Moreover, it argued that, because it claimed sovereignty, the principle of self-determination could not apply to the decolonization of Gibraltar.

22. Two misconceptions lay at the core of that argument. Firstly, although the principle of territorial integrity existed in United Nations doctrine, it by no means applied to the decolonization process of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. There was no alternative to the principle of self-determination. It was therefore crystal clear that the argument that territorial integrity was a relevant principle in the decolonization process was untenable. The principle of territorial integrity could only be applied to prevent the dismemberment of a country. It could not be invoked to restore the borders or territory of a country to what they had been 300 years earlier. Yet that was the basis of Spain's argument in trying to persuade the Committee to deny self-determination to the people of Gibraltar. That was simply a distortion of United Nations doctrine and the principles of international law.

23. Secondly, there was confusion between the issue of decolonization and the issue of a claim of territorial sovereignty. Nowhere was it written that such a claim overrode a colonial people's right to self-determination. Moreover, according to Spain, the very existence of its sovereignty claim prevented the Special Committee from discharging its mandate in the case of Gibraltar without Spain's consent. It even opposed the sending of a visiting mission by the Special Committee to Gibraltar, although only the consent of the United Kingdom was required for such a visit and that had been obtained.

24. He therefore once again asked the Committee and the Special Committee on Decolonization to cease blindly endorsing the annual consensus resolution sponsored by the United Kingdom and Spain, which called for bilateral negotiations between them concerning Gibraltar's future and affairs, yet implicitly ignored the existence of the people of Gibraltar and their political rights. Such a resolution was obsolete: it no longer reflected the position of the parties and failed to take account of changing circumstances or the wishes of the people of Gibraltar.

25. The question must therefore be whether the United Nations saw its role as being that of the protector of the rights of a colonial people in the decolonization process or as that of a referee in a sovereignty dispute between two Member States.

26. More conciliatory statements by Mr. Moratinos, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain, and the Spanish Government's proposal for a dialogue exclusively on issues of local cooperation, with no sovereignty implications, were to be welcomed.

27. Lastly, he reiterated the request that he had made in previous years that the Committee should call for a programme of action for Gibraltar providing that a visiting mission by the Special Committee should go to Gibraltar, that the case of Gibraltar should be referred to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion, and that the resolution adopted at the fifty-

ninth session should authorize the Government of Gibraltar, on behalf of its people, to be present at any talks affecting Gibraltar.

28. *Mr. Caruana withdrew.*

Hearing of petitioners

29. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Bossano (Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament of Gibraltar) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

30. **Mr. Bossano** (Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament of Gibraltar) said that, as in previous years, he was appearing before the Committee in an attempt to dissuade Member States from adopting a resolution calling on Spain and the United Kingdom to enter into negotiations on the status of Gibraltar.

31. Quoting a statement by Mr. Zapatero, the Prime Minister of Spain, to the effect that Spain was determined to hear Gibraltar, he drew attention to the clear distinction between "hearing" and "listening to". Spain, the United Nations and the United Kingdom had been hearing the Gibraltarians for 40 years, but had never really listened to them. The Gibraltarians did not want to be a part of Spain in any shape or form and were not prepared to share any of their territory or sovereignty. Their decolonization was a matter which exclusively concerned them and the administering Power, namely the United Kingdom. Spain had no locus standi in the process. The issue was not whether Spain was willing to hear what the Gibraltarians had to say, but whether the Gibraltarians were prepared to give Spain a voice in their affairs.

32. The answer to that question had always been "no": "no" in 1964, when the representative of Gibraltar had addressed the Committee for the first time; "no" in the referendums of 1967 and 2002; and it was still "no". The reason for that was simple: the Gibraltarians constituted a people with their own country, Gibraltar, which was on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories not because that was Spain's wish, but because the United Kingdom had not granted the maximum possible level of self-government that they desired. Gibraltar was therefore on the list for the same reasons as the other 15 Non-Self-Governing Territories and former colonies. It would remain there until its people exercised their right to self-determination, the only legitimate principle applicable to decolonization provided by the Charter of United Nations.

33. The resolutions on Gibraltar that were habitually adopted by the Committee were at odds with that principle, as was the Brussels Agreement between the United Kingdom and Spain, which those resolutions supported, even though the Agreement conflicted with the Charter, Article 103 of which provided that, in such a case, the obligations under the Charter should prevail.

34. Spain, in order to buttress its agreement, relied on the paragraph of the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, which stated that nothing [in the foregoing paragraphs of the Declaration] should be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign States. However, all the experts on the subject agreed that those provisions of the Declaration did not apply to Non-Self-Governing Territories. Spain might be able to deploy that argument in order to prevent the Basque, Catalan, Galician and Navarran peoples and the people of the Canary Islands from exercising their right of self-determination, but it was absurd to suggest that those provisions applied to Gibraltar, which had not been under Spanish sovereignty for 300 years and the decolonization of which would not therefore jeopardize the territorial integrity of Spain today.

35. There was scant likelihood that Spain would change its attitude if it was prepared merely to hear the Gibraltarians without listening to them and acceding to their request. It was therefore to be hoped that the Committee would stop simply hearing what the Gibraltarians had to say and start listening to them and adopting resolutions in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

36. *Mr. Bossano withdrew.*

37. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Boukhari (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hanira y de Rio de Oro) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

38. **Mr. Boukhari** (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hanira y de Rio de Oro) said that Western Sahara, which had been a Spanish colony from 1884 to 1975, had been invaded by Morocco in October 1975 and had been placed under military occupation, in flagrant violation of international law. That action has

forced the Saharan people to pursue their legitimate struggle for national independence.

39. Ever since then, the international community had been endeavouring to persuade Morocco to end its illegal occupation of Western Sahara. Those efforts had led to the settlement plan, which had been accepted by both the Frente POLISARIO and Morocco and approved by the Security Council in resolution 658 (1990). The explicit objective of the plan had been to organize, no later than February 1992, a referendum allowing the Saharan people to choose independence or integration into Morocco.

40. In 1997, Mr. James Baker, the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, had prevailed upon both parties to sign the Houston agreements, which had removed the main obstacles to the implementation of the settlement plan and had stipulated that the referendum should be held before the end of 2000. In February 2000, however, just after the United Nations had published the list of persons who were entitled to take part in the referendum, Morocco had decided to pull out of the peace process.

41. Although Morocco had reneged on its commitments, the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy had pursued their mediation. In that context, at the beginning of 2003, Mr. James Baker had drawn up the peace plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, to which the Security Council in resolution 1495 (2003) had pledged its full support and which it had asked both parties to accept and implement. The Frente POLISARIO had responded positively to that request, but Morocco had once again thwarted peace by rejecting the new offer. The Secretary-General had then made every effort to persuade Morocco to be less intransigent but, one year later, in a report dated 23 April 2004 (S/2004/325), he had informed the Security Council that Morocco had definitively rejected the peace plan and intended to grant Western Sahara autonomy within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty.

42. Morocco's claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara was an anachronistic relic of old expansionist visions the legitimacy of which had never been recognized by the Saharan people, the international community or the International Court of Justice in The Hague in its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975. He asked whether the international community would decide to press on towards the goal it had set itself, as it had done so successfully in Timor-Leste. The 18 years of efforts and approximately $750 million invested by the United Nations in Western Sahara should prompt it to do so. Moreover, since the States Members of the Organization owed their existence, in one way or another, to the exercise of their right to self-determination, they should urge Morocco to see reason. The right of the Saharan people to join the assembly of free and independent nations should not be sacrificed indefinitely.

43. *Mr. Boukhari withdrew.*

44. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Finkler (Office of United States Congressman Joseph R. Pitts) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

45. **Ms. Finkler** (Office of United States Congressman Joseph R. Pitts), speaking on behalf of Congressman Pitts, said that the reason why dispute in Western Sahara was still unresolved was because one party to the conflict, Morocco, was impeding the organization of a free, fair and transparent referendum that would allow the people of Western Sahara to exercise their right to self-determination. In addition, according to reports received in October 2002, Morocco had signed contracts with foreign companies for the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources, in disregard of the opinion expressed by the Legal Counsel of the United Nations on the question. According to that opinion, Morocco had no sovereignty over Western Sahara and any exploitation of the resources of that Territory without the consent of the people of Western Sahara would be contrary to international law.

46. Unlike many other peoples, the Saharan people had chosen a peaceful path to democracy, since the Frente POLISARIO had freed more than 700 Moroccan prisoners of war since July 2003 and 2,000 prisoners of war since 1991. Morocco had also released prisoners of war, but in fewer numbers and there was still no news of the more than 565 Saharans who had disappeared in Morocco and of the more than 160 Frente POLISARIO soldiers who had been reported missing. The fact that the Saharans were abiding by the ceasefire signed in 1991 with the Moroccan Government also clearly showed that they were genuinely prepared to settle the dispute. Unfortunately, the referendum had been cancelled sine die and unless the dispute in Western Sahara was solved, it was likely to further disrupt

peace and stability in the Maghreb. It was imperative that United Nations officials should use their influence in that region to persuade the parties to implement the peace plan under the Organization's supervision. That would also signal to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa that, in the twenty-first century, there were alternatives to violence in the pursuit of national aspirations. The international community must recognize that the time had come to abandon empty promises and ensure that a free, fair and transparent referendum was held in Western Sahara.

47. The Saharan people had been promised just such a referendum since 1975, but because the Moroccan Government did not want a democratic solution, the United Nations had forgone holding the referendum, thereby casting doubt on its credibility. The line to be followed in order to restore that credibility was plain: since both parties had signed a number of agreements upholding a referendum and voting lists had been drawn up, a referendum must be held in accordance with Security Council resolution 1541 (2004), which reaffirmed the Council's support for the peace plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The Saharan people had demonstrated their good will and deserved the Committee's support.

48. *Ms. Finkler withdrew.*

49. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Divine (Office of United States Congressman Trent Franks) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

50. **Ms. Divine** (Office of United States Congressman Trent Franks), speaking on behalf of Mr. Franks, said that international agreements had been signed by the parties to the conflict and accepted by the international community and that new talks were unnecessary and would serve only to validate those who disregarded the agreements they had made and to undermine international law.

51. The international community must not only refrain from opposing the exercise of the right to self-determination, but must help to secure its implementation, above all by cooperation. The dispute over Western Sahara was dragging on not only because of Morocco's position, but also because the international community had failed to give the people of Western Sahara all the support they needed in order to exercise their right to self-determination. The question of Western Sahara therefore called the international community's credibility and responsibility into question. In that regard, the example being set for future generations was a matter for concern and she wondered whether those who desired justice could secure a hearing only by violating international law.

52. *Ms. Divine withdrew.*

53. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Scholte (President of the Defense Forum Foundation) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

54. **Ms. Scholte** (President of the Defense Forum Foundation) said that Morocco had repeatedly impeded the holding of a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara and the United Nations had set a terrible precedent by rewarding Moroccan aggression and obstruction and punishing the good faith gestures of the Frente POLISARIO, which had always sought a just and peaceful solution while Morocco had persisted in flouting international law. Morocco had invaded Western Sahara after the International Court of Justice had issued an advisory opinion recognizing the right of the Saharans to self-determination and, at that point, the United Nations should have called on Morocco to withdraw. Yet 29 years later, Western Sahara was the only territory in Africa not to have been decolonized. Its inhabitants were repeatedly imprisoned and tortured for championing the United Nations plan for a free and impartial referendum, while journalists and human rights organizations were constantly denied access to Western Sahara.

55. Unlike Morocco, the Frente POLISARIO had accepted the compromise proposed by James Baker, the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara and a former Secretary of State of the United States, although that plan had authorized Moroccans living in the occupied territory to take part in the vote and had strongly resembled the plan put forward by Morocco seven years earlier. In contrast to the situation in respect of the prisoners of war held by the Frente POLISARIO, there was still no information about the fate of the hundreds of Saharan civilians and soldiers who had disappeared during the war or in later years.

56. It was high time for the United Nations to put a stop to Moroccan obstruction; otherwise it would lose its credibility. A deadline should be set for the referendum in the context of the plan proposed by Mr. James Baker and, if Morocco refused to comply, the referendum should go ahead on the basis of the voter registration lists which had already been approved. In the event of opposition from Morocco, the

United Nations should demand that it end its illegal occupation.

57. *Ms. Scholte withdrew.*

58. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Leite (Secretary-General of the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

59. **Mr. Pinto Leite** (International Platform of Jurists for East Timor) said that his organization had militated for years for a free and fair referendum on self-determination for East Timor, which, after brutal difficulties had finally resulted in the creation of an independent State, Timor-Leste, with a seat in the United Nations. There were parallels between the situation of East Timor and that of Western Sahara, and equal cases should be treated equally before the law, following a legal principle common to both domestic and international law.

60. Since the adoption of the famous General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), the right to self-determination had been recognized as a basic right common to all peoples and many considered it to be a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogation was permitted.

61. However, the similarities between the two cases stopped, because in East Timor the referendum had indeed taken place. Morocco, in defiance of international law and the will of the international community, had once more demonstrated its bad faith by rejecting the Peace Plan proposed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, even though the Plan had given in to several Moroccan demands, notably by allowing a majority of Moroccan settlers to vote.

62. It should be remembered that all States were equal before the law and that the United Nations would itself lose credibility if, after obliging Indonesia to comply with the principle of self-determination in East Timor, it should turn a blind eye to the illegal Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. He hoped that the members of the Security Council would soon come to the conclusion that the holding of a fair referendum in accordance with the original Peace Plan drawn up by the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity, which had been signed by Morocco, was the only legal option.

63. Algeria and South Africa were to be commended for having defended the right to self-determination of Western Sahara and East Timor respectively.

64. *Mr. Pinto Leite withdrew.*

65. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Lenz (Saharawi Children's Program — USA) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

66. **Ms. Lenz** (Saharawi Children's Program — USA) said that she had been doing humanitarian work among the Saharan refugees since 1999, in camps situated in western Algeria. She described the daily realities of life for the refugees, their broken dreams, their desire for justice, their hope of return, their patience and their thirst for freedom, in the midst of general indifference. The young people of the emerging generation, which had known no life other than that of refugees were currently being solicited to commit terrorist activities in order to draw attention to the Saharan cause, but were resisting the temptation and choosing peaceful struggle. It was to be hoped that the injustice would stop before a third generation of Saharans was born to life in the camps.

67. *Ms. Lenz withdrew.*

68. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Reverend Parascand (Faith Community Church) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

69. **The Reverend Louis Parascand** (Faith Community Church) observed that the Saharans had been living in refugee camps for 30 years now, in a particularly harsh environment. Despite all the hardships, they had built schools and health facilities and developed a representative government. It should be recalled that in 1991, the General Assembly had adopted a resolution calling for a referendum, which Morocco had rejected when it had become apparent that it would lose such a vote. Morocco had also rejected the most recent Peace Plan proposed by the United Nations, despite the concessions it granted to Morocco. Moreover, Morocco was holding hundreds of Saharans in prison and maintained strict censorship of the press. True stability, however, was possible only in a democratic society.

70. The issue of Western Sahara would not disappear unless the international community seriously enforced the resolutions it had adopted. Pressure therefore had to be put on Morocco, and the resolutions adopted must be applied by holding a transparent referendum.

71. *The Reverend Louis Parascand withdrew.*

72. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. del Valle (Platform of Women Artists against Gender Violence) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

73. **Ms. del Valle** (Platform of Women Artists against Gender Violence) observed that the time that had elapsed between the first General Assembly resolution in favour of the decolonization and self-determination of the Saharan people made it appropriate to ask why the people of Western Sahara could not exercise their right to self-determination. Among the conceivable reasons for such a situation were inaction, incompetence, manipulations, mistaken priorities, money and injustice.

74. After having been colonized by Spain, Western Sahara had been invaded by Morocco, which was rejecting all United Nations resolutions as well as the Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of Western Sahara proposed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. Nevertheless, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic had been recognized by dozens of countries, most recently South Africa, even though part of its territory was still illegally occupied. It was important for the Committee, finally, to fulfil its obligations.

75. *Ms. del Valle withdrew.*

76. **Mr. Pisa** (United Kingdom), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, observed that the position of the United Kingdom was well known. At issue was the observance of the principles set out in the preamble to the Constitution of Gibraltar, according to which any change of sovereignty required the prior consent of the population of Gibraltar. A solution could be found only through dialogue, the aim being to assure a better future for the people of Gibraltar.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.